

Developing an Effective Employee Performance Appraisal

Executive Development

Developing an Effective Employee Performance Appraisal for Part Time Personnel

within the Beach Park Fire Department

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August 2007

Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at <http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/> to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.

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Abstract

The Beach Park Fire Department is an organization comprised of full time, career firefighters and part-time firefighters located in a rapidly growing area. The problem was that there is no performance appraisal mechanism in place to effectively assess its part time firefighters. The purpose of this research was to assess what is utilized in the fire service currently and research what components are needed to develop a functional performance appraisal system. Further researched was how to implement an appraisal system successfully in order to achieve the optimum benefits for both the firefighter and the department utilizing the compiled data. The Action Research Method was utilized in creating an evaluation program and fully implemented by the department outlining essential job functions through the use of industry standards, job descriptions, and best practices. Continual evaluation of this system and modification is recommended in the future.

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Introduction

The Beach Park Fire Department is a rapidly growing fire department in the far northern suburbs of Chicago. As the department continues to grow, many changes are required to remain a valuable resource in the community. The department is comprised of career and part time personnel that make up the daily staff required to sufficiently provide services within the district. It is the intent of the administration to cohesively bind these two, very different personnel positions in order to provide both fire and emergency medical services (EMS) safely and effectively to the public. Currently, the career personnel are given a performance appraisal on an annual basis. This instrument allows for the career employee to have a thorough knowledge of what is expected of them in regards to their job performance. While the career and part time personnel continue to operate together, they are not held to similar standards.

The problem is the Beach Park Fire Department does not currently have an appraisal mechanism in place to effectively assess its part time personnel. The lack of a certified assessment is causing both conflict and distrust between these two working groups. The purpose of this research is to identify what should be included in an effective performance appraisal; in addition, specific employee performance instruments already in use in the workplace will be reviewed. The study used the action research method to develop an employee appraisal system while answering the following questions:

1. What are the common components outlined in part time employee performance appraisal instruments that are currently utilized in the fire service?
2. What standards should be utilized to effectively evaluate fire department personnel?

3. How are part time employee appraisals being utilized by fire departments currently?
4. What does the Beach Park Fire Department want to accomplish with a part time employee performance appraisal instrument?
5. What type of part time performance appraisal system would be most effective for the Beach Park Fire Department?
6. How can a performance appraisal system be implemented by the Fire Department to effectively evaluate part time employees?

Utilizing existing performance review instruments, questionnaires, personal interviews, and literature available that pertains to this critical issue, the purpose of this research is to describe the current issues within the department that the lack of a performance appraisal for part time personnel has caused and develop an effective system that will satisfactorily measure part-time employee competencies to ensure employees are held to proper standards and abilities.

Background and Significance

The Beach Park Fire Department is a fire and EMS delivery service that is located in Northern Lake County Illinois. The department was initially organized as the Bonnie Brook Fire Protection District in May of 1942 as a volunteer fire department. In 2002, the name was changed to better identify the community with which the department was serving. The fire department lies within the County of Lake which is a rapidly growing area in Northern Illinois. The population of the County is approximately 695,000 individuals and is very diverse in ethnicity. The Beach Park Fire Department is 12 square miles of the County and has a permanent population of 12,500 individuals. The fire department is a full service department that provides fire suppression, Advanced Life Support and transports patients, hazardous materials mitigation, water rescue, wildland firefighting, and various other specialized rescue services. In addition to providing emergency services within its own district boundaries, the department is heavily involved in mutual aid agreements with its neighboring fire departments. These agreements include giving and receiving mutual aid for emergency medical services (EMS) and fire suppression with the Waukegan Fire Department, the largest fire department within the County.

The department has had some very difficult periods within its short history. Prior to 2002, the department had an extremely high turnover of its highest ranking officers and had struggled financially for many years. The Department is a fire protection district that levies its own taxes which are predominantly property taxes. In 1989, the department augmented its fire suppression responsibilities with that of EMS. At that time, the department was receiving tax money for fire suppression only. By State Statute, the

district is allowed to levy and ambulance tax for the purpose of providing EMS to its residents. The only stipulation is that it be done by voter approval. After an unsuccessful referendum it was decided at that time to provide the service with no additional tax money. While this service was augmented by ambulance billing, the costs of operating this service were significant. At the time, the department was able to provide services as a purely volunteer fire department.

As the population began to increase with the housing boom in Lake County in the early 1990's, incident responses began to rapidly increase within the district. It was decided by the District Board to initiate paying personnel on a part time basis during daytime hours to ensure a proper response was made. This was to be followed in 2000 by employing the department's first two full-time firefighters. This small contingent of employees would be changed out in the evening with on call firefighters responding from their residences. During this period, there were no formal employee appraisals for any employees of the department. This mediocre system would remain in existence for the next two years.

In 2002, a change in the Fire Chief within the department caused significant changes to be made. A strategic plan was developed that identified the need to have full-time personnel along with part-time personnel. The critical problem identified at the time was funding the operation. Without the proper funding, it was not feasible to retain full-time employees. This cost was too significant for the district to bear. After four additional tax referendums for the ambulance tax, the two full time employees were terminated. This left the department to operate with only part-time personnel during the day and

individuals volunteering to sleep at the station at night. This was the only financially feasible option available to operate the essential services necessary.

In 2006, with the threat of eliminating EMS completely to the citizens, the tax referendum was successful. This, after payment of incurred debt, would allow the department to operate effectively yet remain fiscally responsible to its constituents. The Beach Park Fire Department was able to hire three full-time individuals immediately due to the obtainment of the Federal Staffing (SAFER) Grant. In addition to this staff, the department increased the number of part-time personnel working daily. Currently the full-time staff receives an annual performance appraisal, which not only provides a detailed observance of their performance in regards to their job description, as well as monetary benefits included with optimal performance. While the part time firefighters work in conjunction with the full time firefighters, there are currently no evaluation tools to determine if their performance is satisfactory and ensure that they are adequately prepared to safely operate within the department.

The primary issue is that firefighters operating in an emergency capacity that are not trained properly or do not possess the skills to operate safely become a definite liability to themselves, the individuals they are responding to and the fire department and other firefighters. Additionally, having measurable guidelines for full-time members and not for part-time members creates a delineation that bears frustration and anger for full time employees that may be at risk.

During the Executive Development Program at the National Fire Academy, the ability to make adaptive changes by a fire department was discussed at length. It is apparent that developing and implementing a Performance Appraisal System for part time personnel in

a department that has never had such a program is undoubtedly an adaptive challenge for any individual who might undertake such a task. The desired result of a functional Performance Appraisal System is that employee performance will increase and personnel issues will decrease. Should this program not be implemented, a heightened increase in the discussed problems will intensify and the potential for serious complications and potential litigation may become reality.

This paper undoubtedly supports the United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objective to reduce the loss of life from fire of firefighters if the performance appraisal system is properly instituted. By having well skilled personnel who understand what is expected of them and can operate at and preferably above the required standard, all parties will be safer and service quality will be optimum. Further, the identification of performance enhancing goals for part time personnel will assist in the career development of these employees with the potential of reducing costs of training new employees.

Literature Review

A performance evaluation is designed to assist the employee in understanding how well they are performing their jobs in conjunction with set specific minimum standards. This is a critical tool that can be used for a variety of purposes. One of the main purposes is to make decisions about employee such as promotion, commendation, discipline, and possible pay increases. The need to make these decisions properly and fairly is paramount. There are many types of performance appraisal systems that can be utilized effectively in the fire service. The key is to develop one that will specifically meet the needs of the employees that are to be evaluated (Edwards, 2005).

Employees want to be measured against objective standards that all parties involved in the process understand. If employees are rewarded and recognized for outstanding performance, they are more likely to work with the goal of high level achievement (Neal, 2001). Further, employees must be included in the entire performance appraisal system process in order to be successful. These individuals should be involved in this process, participating in all facets including writing job descriptions, as well as identifying necessary goals and standards for the process. It has been determined that personnel that are intimately involved in the process will trust the appraisal system and be committed to their own development (Delpo, 2005). Part time employees must also be included in performance management. It is true that some elements in the review process of the individual may differ slightly from full time or career firefighters. Regardless of this fact it is still critical that managers develop a mechanism to provide feedback to these vital employees (Kramer, 2002). According to Frederick Stowell (2004), feedback to

employees certainly improves efficiency to both the organization and employee while allowing both to prosper.

Goal setting is also a priority that should be incorporated in an appraisal system. While this is sometimes completed by the superior, it appears to have the most effect when done mutually Marshall Sashkin writes “Real participation in mutual goal setting helps develop and support an organizational climate of increased satisfaction and productivity, and an effective performance-appraisal system should emphasize superior-subordinate goal setting” (Sashkin, 1981). These mutual goals should specify what performance criteria and results are needed to be accomplished within a specific time span. They should be based on the key areas that are represented in the performance appraisal (Eichel & Bender, 2007).

When developing an employee appraisal system for a fire department, it is important to examine the most widely used performance assessment techniques. While all of these systems are used in a variety of workplaces, it is evident that not all will be successful in the fire service. The first and most widely used system is the graphic rating scale system. This system incorporates a line or series of boxes that best describes the performance of the individual being rated (Edwards, 2005). This system employs a series of numbers on the line and displays from below average at one end to above average on the other. While this system may be an easier system for the evaluator, the system at times may not fit for the specific objective (Edwards, 2005). Because of that fact, this is a general rating, it may allow incorrect interpretation by the employee thereby causing the individual to be angry and defensive. For this to be successful, the evaluator must include comments and

notes to explain the rationale for the rating or information to increase performance (Delpo, 2005).

A method that has proven effective is the critical incident method. This method requires written documentation be kept for employees that outlines both above and below average performance. At the time of preparing the evaluation, the employer utilizes this documentation along with other data to evaluate the employee's performance (Edwards, 2005). The documentation that has been preserved should unquestionably be extreme behaviors. These behaviors should not only be kept for appraisal purposes, legal implications may be factored in with the negative documentation (Bacal, 1999).

An interesting system that is utilized in the workforce today is the Management by Objectives (MBO) system. This system requires that a supervisor and employee set standards for the employee to accomplish and in the review, the employee is evaluated on whether they have met the desired objectives (Bacal, 2004). This unique type of system requires a great deal of conversation between a manager and subordinate, specifically how they will accomplish the desired objectives. In order for this type of system to succeed, it is imperative that the dialogue and the planning process between the two groups take place and attainable goals are set. The thought is the employee will strive to reach goals mutually set (Edwards, 2005). The key element to the evaluation of the objectives is that they must be focused on a result, not an activity. Further, they must be consistent and related to time. While this performance technique system was developed by Peter Drucker in 1954, it is important to note his philosophy on the subject. Drucker placed in perspective his thought on this management method by stating "It's just another tool. It is not the great cure for management inefficiency. Management by objectives

works if you know the objectives, 90% of the time you don't" (Management by Objectives, 2007). Management by Objectives also has additional concerns when utilizing such a system within the fire service. Because the emphasis is on measurable, quantitative objectives, it may be hard to quantify in emergency situations (Edwards, 2005).

A ranking system is another evaluation system utilized in the workplace. This system evaluates all employees with the same job description and ranks them accordingly. While this system is effectively utilized in large corporations, it is a system with a lot of criticism. Critics continually claim the system is unfair, subjective, and discriminatory (Grote, 2002). This system may also cause employee morale issues as it is designed to rank employees against each other in regards to their performance (Edwards, 2005).

The system that has gained popularity in the workplace is Total Quality Management (TQM) System. This concept focuses primarily on continuous improvement in all work areas by providing feedback to employees as to how they can improve their performance. The fact that employees will make mistakes is identified and the hope is that any future mistakes will be eliminated (Hashmi, 2000). The TQM system is built on three specific building blocks which are ethics, integrity, and trust. All three of these critical elements must work cohesively together to ensure success. Further, employee and employer interaction must take place for ultimate success (Padhi, 2000).

A system that has been the source of much controversy is referred to as the 360-Degree Appraisal System. This technique incorporates supervisors, co-workers, and even subordinates to evaluate the employee. This anonymous system goes directly to the employee and the supervisor may not be fully aware of the results. While this system

provides feedback to performance, it may not allow for an employer to track employee performance. For this reason, this system further requires additional appraisal systems to be developed for developmental purposes (Neal, 2001). In a personal interview with Victoria McGrath (Personal Communication June, 2007) the owner of a consulting firm charged with developing performance appraisal systems, she stated that this type of evaluation has had great success when used correctly in career and part-time departments. Further, she stated that this type of feedback has a profound impact on the employee when discussed by their superiors and peers in the counseling session.

An intriguing system that may be utilized effectively in the fire service is one that incorporates behaviorally anchored rating scales. This system combines the elements of the critical incident system and graphic rating scales to rate an employee's performance (Management Modern, 1998). This system utilizes numbers along a scale and a description of the employee's specific job behaviors. The description inserted into each section includes information regarding the level of performance that is expected. This system focuses on specific job behaviors rather than on traits or characteristics. Because of the environment the fire service provides, employing both career and part-time personnel, this system is more aligned with evaluating necessary goals and objectives (Edwards, 2005).

There are many articles and publications that outline the reasons why performance appraisals are necessary. In fact, it seems this tool, when used correctly, can aid an employee in many facets from psychological to psychomotor. It is the primary reason for performance improvement and employee motivation (Grote, 2002). While interviewing Beach Park Fire Chief Paul Tierney (personal communication, May 2007), motivation of

part time employees is probably more critical as that of full time firefighters. Typically, part time firefighters have outside full time employment and may provide these duties for various reasons, both personally and professionally. The need to have every individual involved in their success and the success of the organization is paramount.

There are some problems that are encountered by organizations that complete performance appraisals for employees. One of the most disturbing hindrances is that of the lack of support by upper management. The inability to have all levels of management in support will definitely cause a failure of the system (Bender, 2007, June). Another common issue with performance appraisals is the lack of training for the individual who will be conducting the performance appraisal. Depending on the complexity, this may require a comprehensive training course in a conventional classroom (Grote, 2002).

There are also common errors encountered during the appraisal process that might directly affect the appraisal and its ability to be productive. Historically, these pitfalls have been common and all appraisers must be aware of them and how to avoid them. The first error identified is that of recency error. This happens when an appraiser only focuses on recent events and not on those that have taken place throughout the entire evaluation period. According to Dr. Victoria McGrath, this has been the most common error seen and can have devastating effects. While the employee may have been above average earlier in the period, certain issues may have taken place that causes the evaluator to feel as though the employee has become complacent. It is important to document that such substandard behavior has taken place in the evaluation period, it is equally important to find out why this has taken place (McGrath personal communications May, 2007). There is also the opposite of recency and that is the primacy effect. This describes only

evaluating on early events and not on those throughout the evaluation period (Edwards, 2005).

Another common influence or error seen in performance appraisals is that of central tendency or average tendency. This error occurs when evaluators rate all employees as average regardless of their performance. This can occur when an evaluator is required to evaluate many employees and may require less documentation than when extremes are observed (Edwards, 2005). Some evaluators also have tendencies to rate extremely lenient or extreme. Neither behavior is beneficial to the employee and may ultimately cause an employee appraisal system to fail. It is also interesting to note that in America, the tendency is that to be more lenient in evaluating employee performance (Neal, 2001).

The Halo Effect is another error that is seen in employee appraisals. This occurs when an employee is rated extremely high in one area which influences the evaluator to rate the employee high in other areas. This error can be caused by a lack of knowledge and training of the evaluator causing a misunderstanding of what is truly being evaluated in each category (Bender, 2007). It is incumbent upon the evaluator to take time to cautiously evaluate employee performance and understand the evaluation process. One specific behavior of an employee does not all encompass every work attribute (Delpo, 2005).

Finally, a common error seen is the similar to me effect more commonly known as the frame of reference error. This tendency is one to rate individuals who resemble the evaluator higher (Grote, 2002). This error can also severely impact the effectiveness of a performance appraisal and should not become part of the document.

The ability to effectively provide feedback to an employee can be extremely challenging. To contrast this with mutual goal setting with employees can not only be rewarding but can be extremely successful. It is paramount that evaluators understand the performance appraisal process and how to properly execute the appraisal system. Goal setting is critical in the development of successful employees. A clear path must be delineated to the employee to ensure they are accomplishing what is expected of them by their supervisor. By properly educating employees and providing guidance and feedback to the employee, one can only expect positive results.

Procedures

The research procedure utilized in this paper consisted of various resources. The initial research was initiated by examining various Executive Fire Officer Applied Research Projects at the learning Resource Center in at the National Fire Academy. Additional research was completed by thoroughly reviewing resources online pertaining to the development of performance appraisal systems. In order to obtain additional data, a literature review was conducted at the College of Lake County, Grayslake Illinois and at the Warren Newport Library and the Grayslake Public Libraries in Illinois. Other literature reviewed was obtained from the author's personal library and the training centers at the Beach Park Fire Department and the Grayslake Fire Department in Illinois.

On June 8, 2007, a personal interview was conducted with Doctors Tim McGrath and Victoria McGrath of McGrath Consulting. These individuals have extensive knowledge in human resources and the development of performance appraisal programs for both career and part-time fire departments. Questions posed to these experts were centered on

information regarding appraisals and the need for them in a part time firefighter setting. Additional questions focused on what should be included in the performance appraisal and what should the employee gain from this experience. Discussed were a variety of pitfalls associated with performance appraisals and the type of performance appraisal that seems to have the most success in the fire service.

Another interview was conducted on May 2, 2007 with Paul Tierney who currently holds the rank of Fire Chief for the Beach Park Fire Department. This interview consisted of determining the Chief's concerns were relative to the performance of part time firefighters and what he feels should be the outcome of this research. The current job description of a firefighter employed by the Beach Park Fire Department was reviewed and what possible incentives could be included for top performing firefighters. Further reviewed was the current performance appraisal for career firefighters and what sections could be evaluated for part time personnel.

A questionnaire was submitted to all 37 part time firefighters employed by the Beach Park Fire Department. This document requested information regarding the importance of a performance appraisal completed for each individual. Additionally, information was requested as to the primary topics to be evaluated, any benefits to the outstanding performer as well as how often and who should perform the appraisal. This process was critical due to the importance of knowing exactly what each employee feels is necessary, fair, and what may possibly assist them in achieving satisfaction within the part time workforce. The ability to understand the employee thought process on this subject only strengthens the notion that safety is a primary concern.

In order to ascertain the merit of performance appraisals within area fire services, a questionnaire was also disseminated via electronic mail to 47 area fire chiefs. This comprehensive document requested information on how many performed appraisal on employees and what were the priorities within the appraisal system. Additional information was sought as to what information was requested within the currently utilized appraisal form. Much data was received from the 36 fire chiefs who replied to this request, including specific criteria that were deemed successful by the responders (See Appendix 1). There was also sample performance appraisals that are currently utilized by this peer group provided via email for this study.

On June 8, 2007, a workshop was attended by the author that focused on performance appraisal techniques and a legal perspective on this research topic. The presenters consisted of Dr. Lewis Bender Ph.D. who lectures nationwide on performance appraisals. Also speaking was Robert J. Smith Jr. who is a partner with the law firm of Seyfarth Shaw LLP, a counsel for various local governmental entities. The entire focus of the day was performing effective appraisals and problem solving exercises. Some information that was obtained at this event has been incorporated in this research project, strengthening the argument that this is a vital task that undoubtedly needs to be performed.

There was one limitation noted to the procedures outlined. The questionnaire that was sent electronically to select fire chiefs was only from the region that the author is located. There was no information provided outside of the Northern Illinois area. Therefore, it is impossible to know exactly, any implications this may have on research done outside of this area.

A review of applicable Standards in relation to firefighters was conducted. This research focused on the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1001, Standard for Fire fighter Professional Qualifications. This document's intent is to provide a standard for personnel who are trained to this minimum standard can function effectively at an emergency scene when supervised by a qualified firefighter or officer (Kipp & Loflin, 1996). NFPA 1500, Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program were also reviewed to ensure that the evaluated objectives contained within the performance appraisal conform to this crucial standard. These two standards are consensus standards that are utilized to assist in implementing departmental operations.

The job description for firefighters that was adopted by the Beach Park Fire Department was scrutinized with necessary functions and responsibilities outlined within the job description taken into account in the development of the appraisal. The utilization of the job description in the development process of the performance appraisal is vital. Necessary components outlined in the description should closely align with those of the appraisal (personal communication, McGrath). The current full time personnel appraisal was examined along with additional appraisal tools currently utilized in the fire service.

Definition of Terms

Emergency Medical Services: A national network of services coordinated to provide aid and medical assistance from primary response to definitive care; it involves personnel trained in rescue, stabilization, transportation, and advanced treatment of traumatic or medical emergencies (Sanders, 2001).

Fire Protection District: A taxing entity that provides fire suppression, rescue services, fire inspections, public education, and emergency medical services to a geographical area outlined by State Statute.

Full Time (Career) Firefighter: An individual who is fully paid for their firefighting services and have made a full time commitment to their firefighting duties (Freeman, 2002).

Management by Objectives: A system whereby managers and subordinates set objectives and measure progress towards them (Olson, 1981).

Part Time Firefighter: Individuals paid on a part time basis and augment the career firefighters in fulfilling their necessary duties (Freeman, 2002).

Performance Appraisal System: A system developed to evaluate an employee's performance strengths and weaknesses, determine future goals, motivate employees, and provide documentation for rewarding and disciplining employees (Delpo, 2005)

SAFER Grant: This is a funding mechanism created by the Federal Government to provide funding directly to fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations in order to help them increase the number of trained "front-line" firefighters available in their communities (FEMA, 2007).

Results

Research Question 1. What are the common components outlined in part-time performance appraisal instruments that are currently utilized in the fire service?

The components outlined in performance appraisal instruments utilized for part-time employees do not vary from those used in appraisals for career or full-time firefighters. It

seems that the measurable performance standards and objectives apply unilaterally throughout the fire service with the variance being which technique is employed by the specific agency. What does vary is how these goals and objectives are in fact measured. The technique most commonly found in performance appraisal is one that incorporates a graphic rating scale. This technique appears to allow the evaluator with the clearest method in the evaluation process. This specific method also allows the employee the advantage of knowing on a rating where there performance measures.

Another component utilized is the establishment of specific goals and objectives for the employee to strive to achieve before the next evaluation period. In most situations, as found during research, this was accomplished by mutual consensus between employee and evaluator during the performance appraisal session.

Research Question 2. What standards should be utilized to effectively evaluate fire department personnel?

The standards employed effectively to evaluate fire department personnel are very specific. Much research has been concluded by fire service experts to author very specific “industry standards”. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) publishes two important standards found to be utilized. The first is NFPA 1001, Standard on Firefighter Professional Qualifications. This standard addresses competency that should be reasonably expected that all firefighters should perform. If competent of these topics one should assume that a firefighter should function at an emergency situation with direct supervision.

Another NFPA standard is NFPA 1500, Standard on a Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program. This standard provides necessary safety and health competencies that should assist in determining whether the individual being evaluated is physically competent to perform the necessary tasks. This vital standard is one that has been brought to the forefront of the fire service when considering that the number one firefighter line of duty death cause is cardiac related. When firefighters are physically fit and understand the risk factors of cardiac problems, the alarming number of fire fighter deaths should decrease.

The incorporation of department standard operating procedures (SOP's) and guidelines (SOG's) should occur to effectively evaluate fire department personnel. These very specific standards have been developed from the best practices of the department the individual is employed. All firefighters employed by a department regardless of classification, should be intimately familiar with these procedures and guidelines. The topics contained in these standards vary and it is important for the developer of the department evaluation to review each guideline and find specific, measurable items to incorporate into the performance appraisal.

Understanding the requirements related to the firefighter job description set forth by the department is essential. Included in an effective evaluation should be the standards recognized in this document. Fire service managers must include the essential job functions identified through research when developing a performance appraisal.

Another item that may be incorporated into an evaluation is applicable EMS protocols or best practices that have been developed by the EMS System in which the fire department provides EMS for their community through. The protocol is a tool that can

assist fire department EMT's or Paramedics in making critical life saving decisions. Decisions such as these are executed in highly stressful situations and necessitate an individual to know and understand these standards.

Research Question 3. How are part time employee appraisals being utilized by fire departments currently?

The utilization of part-time performance appraisals is not as widely used as those of career personnel. The employee appraisals that are used appear to mimic those of career personnel. The components required of each class of employee are similar, but part-time employees typically do not have incentives such as pay increases attached to them. The need for qualified and competent employees is critical and appraisals provide a mechanism to measure minimum benchmarks.

Research Question 4. What does the Beach Park Fire Protection District want to accomplish with a part-time employee performance appraisal instrument?

The Beach Park Fire Protection District hopes to accomplish several objectives with the development and implementation of a part-time personnel appraisal. First and foremost, employing capable, competent, and safe employees to service the residents and visitors to the District is imperative. This ability overshadows any other expectation that management has for employees and any goals that may be outlined for such. These essential performance objectives must be addressed and a mechanism must be in place to do so. By instituting a performance appraisal system, management is ensuring that core departmental competencies are met.

The ability to provide feedback and recognition is also critical to the career development of part-time employees. Generally, they are not provided many incentives

and the issue of performance objectives only enhances the need for such. Personal development is essential and can be enhanced through employees knowing what is expected of them. Part time employees should also be considered long term employees and performance appraisals are essential in the planning process for the development of their career. By providing this feedback to the employee, it is anticipated that specific benchmarks and goal setting will assist in molding future leaders of the Beach Park Fire Protection District.

Research Question 5. What type of part-time performance appraisal system would be most effective for the Beach Park Fire Protection District?

The most effective appraisal system for the district is a combination appraisal system. It is one that is similar to that most widely used throughout the fire service. There will be several identifiable objectives that are rated on a scale. This allows the supervisor to benchmark the employee where their performance is in relation to a specific number. Also included for each will be an area for the supervisor to clearly define why the employee was rated as such.

Another component that will be included in the appraisal will be one that allows for specific goals to be outlined for the employee and employer to specify. The goals will be specific in nature and will become part of the next appraisal period.

Probably the most important aspect of this appraisal system will be that both the employee and supervisor will be involved in the process. By fostering this open communication, the employee will know implicitly how his or her performance and abilities rate with the standards currently being used. It is intended that the identification

of substandard performance will be identified and corrected immediately. Further, any areas that the employee excels will be documented and rewarded appropriately.

Research Question 6. How can a performance appraisal system be implemented by the Fire District to effectively evaluate part-time employees?

The concept of implementing a performance appraisal system within the Beach Park Fire Protection District can be accomplished easily and efficiently. The Fire District has a relatively young roster that will enthusiastically embrace the concept of performing at a higher level for the citizens of the district. The system would be presented to the administration for inclusion of all necessary objectives and goals prior to finalizing the appraisal document. This process will be reviewed prior to every performance period to ensure necessary objectives remain appropriate.

The performance appraisal program will also include proper training for supervisors tasked with evaluating employees. This training will involve reviewing what is expected in each measurable category and how to avoid common appraisal errors. The proper delivery of the appraisal to the employee will be another topic that is clarified for supervisors and how to develop clear goals for the employee will be instructed. The performance appraisal system will be completed on an annual basis for employees and will allow for employee concerns to be addressed by the Chief and Deputy Chief if not clearly defined within the appraisal.

A Performance Appraisal Report was drafted, incorporating the review of employee performance measurements that are critical their success in the fire service as a part time firefighter (Appendix 3). The program was presented to the officers for proper deployment to the firefighters that will be appraised on each of their shifts respectively.

The evaluations were completed and reviewed with respective employees by their supervisor and returned to the author for review. In reviewing the information, it is apparent that additional training will be necessary for firefighters as to what is expected of them. The lack of knowledge relative to certain requirements was an argument posed to the evaluators when presenting the evaluation. Overall, the feedback provided by the evaluators and firefighters was positive. This information illustrates that the firefighters are genuinely concerned with their performance and with performing these standards within certain parameters.

In reviewing results from the questionnaire provided to the part time firefighters of the Beach Park Fire Department, it is obvious that there is a genuine concern that employees meet and exceed department standards. Job performance is shown to be the top priority in the appraisal process. Attendance and maintaining a positive attitude also were important to this group. Fire department surveys typically include these evaluation components primarily because of the importance in providing quality and prompt service to those individuals we serve.

Another questionnaire sent to surrounding Fire Chiefs provided additional strength to the argument that performance appraisals are an important component in employee relations. This instrument asked a series of questions that outlined demographics and what components are necessary to accurately appraise firefighters. When reviewing this information, it is evident that similar components are utilized in current performance appraisals. This information only strengthens the research done for this project ensuring the successful development of the program.

Discussion

The results of this Applied Research Program have been evaluated and the potential implications have been analyzed for the Beach Park Fire Protection District. It has become apparent that the need to have an evaluation mechanism for part time employees is important and incumbent upon fire service managers to ensure this takes place (Kramer, 2002). This systematic procedure required in human resource management is one that should be formally presented at least on an annual basis. This annual timeframe should not deter the supervisor from on-going performance appraisals throughout an employee's tenure. The ability to document an employee's strengths and weaknesses along with additional channels for an employee to excel in their performance is critical not only from a service delivery standpoint but legally (Stowell, 2004).

The employee performance appraisal system was instituted after careful planning and review of necessary job requirements. In order for an employee to understand what is expected of them, they must first know what will be evaluated. According to Dr. Victoria McGrath,

Knowledge of firefighter performance is critical for not only career firefighters to understand, the attitude towards the part time firefighting employment must be positive and the individual must take this seriously. In all reality, there is no difference between these two groups of employees in an emergency situation (McGrath, Personal interview June 2007).

In regards to professional development of the part time firefighters in Beach Park, what is a critical element to the continued success in service delivery to the system. Having a structure for individuals to follow and a path to understanding goals is essential.

By utilizing a performance appraisal system, these goals along with job performance can be documented and referred to in future counseling sessions. Having tangibles keeps individuals aligned to accomplishing such tangible objectives and can only improve employee morale. Fire Chief Paul Tierney states “the buy in comes when the employee is included in the process, ultimately creating his or her own success” (Tierney, personal interview May, 2007). Professional development includes not only a proficient knowledge of fire service related materials. The need to have individuals trained in management and supervision techniques is critical in a small department like that of Beach Park (Edwards, 2005). In a Red Ribbon Report titled Lighting the Path of Evolution, Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments (November, 2005), a statement is made which defines why this research is so critical. The report states:

The expectations of leadership are the same whether career or volunteer members hold top positions. These expectations are the same for firefighters as well. Being trained and competent is not determined by a paycheck but by the level of commitment. Everyone should be expected to be trained and competent; a paycheck or lack of one is not an excuse for incompetence.

The Beach Park Fire Protection unquestionably suffers from a void in the area of performance appraisals for part time firefighters. This was not intentional but perhaps overlooked by previous administrators of the District. The results of this research have shown that this is not a problem isolated to this one agency but to others throughout the region. Much research has been completed about this critical component of human resources, performance appraisal systems, not only in the fire service but that of the

private sector. “A performance appraisal is the sum of all methods, procedures, forms, and so on that an organization uses to evaluate the performance of its employees. It’s the nucleus of an organization’s efforts to motivate its employees to work more productively and to reward them for doing so” (Lefton, 1980). This important information is certainly true for the Fire District to be its driving force in continuing this appraisal program in the future. As the program grows in complexity, it is hoped that it may become a model for other combination fire departments suffering from the same employee issues as that of the District.

This ARP was designed to study successes and failures in employee performance appraisals and the development of a written instrument to fulfill the void within the Beach Park Fire Department. The following are the anticipated results of this research for the Beach Park Fire Protection District.

- 1. It is anticipated that with the introduction of the Performance Appraisal Program within the District will enhance the knowledge base of the part time firefighters in knowing what is truly expected of each individual.**
- 2. There will be better accountability by management of the District in ensuring employees perform to expected standards.**
- 3. Employees will author with their supervisor obtainable goals for the performance appraisal period. This will allow for clearer career development for part time employees.**

4. **The administration will be part of the career development of each individual part time firefighting and an increase in positive morale is hoped and desired.**
5. **There will be no delineation in the performance requirements of part time firefighters and career firefighters.**
6. **Due to a performance standard being set, citizens of the community that are protected may possibly see a higher delivery of service in emergency situations.**
7. **Supervisors will obtain additional management skills through the training and the delivery of performance appraisals to firefighters.**
8. **The department will enjoy a more cohesive bond with all firefighters and the organization will continue to prosper through a period involving rapid growth of the department and the community that is served..**

Recommendations

Through this research, it can be concluded that the Beach Park Fire Protection District is truly an organization in need of a performance appraisal system for part time firefighters. Having a working knowledge of what is expected of each individual and be involved in positive goal setting is critical. A diverse workforce that is well trained and prepared to face every emergency that may unfold is paramount. There should be no delineation as to whether an individual is a full time or part time firefighter and whether they are properly trained or consistently acting in a safe manner. A workforce that can

operate effectively together regardless of pay status is a goal the District administration strives to achieve.

As the performance appraisal program continues to develop even further, evaluation of the appraisal and its components is necessary and vital. It is incumbent upon the organization to allow for these necessary changes as they evolve. Constant evaluation and a commitment by all to complete an appraisal on each individual annually at a minimum will be necessary. Further, each part time firefighter needs to understand the importance of this evaluation and understand its importance relative to the steps necessary to perform productively and reach outlined goals. Additionally, supervisors must continue to make strides in human resource training, ensuring that productive feedback is provided, allowing their firefighters the necessary tools to be successful.

The Beach Park Fire Protection District will continue to grow rapidly. With this growth, changes in the workforce it employs will be inevitable. By continuing an effective performance appraisal system, the environment surrounding the Fire District will be safer and its workforce will be more prepared to respond to emergency situations, ultimately saving lives in the community.

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